

ЦЕНТРАЛЬНАЯ АЗИЯ И АФГАНИСТАН В МИРОВОЙ ПОЛИТИКЕ

UDC 327

Russian foreign policy toward the Central Asian Region in comparison to the Chinese and American policies

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The fall of the Soviet Union prompted a vast amount of political change across the globe. A bipolar global power structure transformed into a unipolar diplomatic one. In the wake of this structural shift, the former Soviet Republics gained independence — along with all its merits and challenges. Great Powers were forced to reassess their relationships under new geopolitical conditions. Meanwhile, the newly formed Central Asian Republics were brought to the forefront of global attention. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan's developmental journey is not simply regionally significant, but also globally. Geographical, economic, and political factors make the region pivotal for the Great Powers. Faced with challenges like ethnic, religious, and political conflict; the Great Powers have competed to gain influence in the region. This competition has included both soft and hard power tactics. The scope of this paper is limited to three involved Great Powers in the region: Russia, China, and the United States. Their relationships with the Central Asian states are unique. The diversity of their foreign policy goals, capabilities, and challenges toward Central Asia paint a complex mosaic of international relations. Nevertheless, this analysis will clearly illustrate that these Great Powers have more opportunity for cooperation than just conflict.

Keywords: Russian foreign policy, Central Asia, regional rivalry, global rivalry.

I. REGIONAL RIVALRY

Before addressing the global concerns, we must first discuss the regional realities. The international media has presented arguments, which explicitly or implicitly report about a

regional rivalry between Turkey and Iran in Central Asia. While such stories easily catch the eyes, they require closer non-partisan observation to examine the accuracy of such claims. In this brief section, we conduct an analysis of Turkish and Iranian policy priorities in the region.

Turkey

The media reported that Turkey competed with both the Great Powers and Iran, as a regional power, in Central Asia. Ankara is supposedly done that to establish a symbolic level of influence in the region. This symbolic influence is applied to the soft power strategies and ideological Turkic unity. However, Turkish foreign policy has economic interests in having a stable Central Asia and plays no further role than being a balancing power. Excluding the humanitarian tendencies towards undemocratic attitudes, such as Uzbekistan's policy in Andijan under Karimov's rule, Turkey has been more involved with economic outcomes. For Ankara, economic acquisitions, such as business initiations, benefit from energy, and natural sources, are built on good diplomatic relations with soft power and stability in the region.

Turkish Foreign Policy Goals & Means

Aside of the global competition in the region, Turkey, as a regional power, has seen no harm to become another actor in trading, security, technology, education in Central Asia since 1991. Turkey was both familiar with the culture in the geography and the identity building process which the post-Soviet countries went through. In the last decade, Turkey played an active role in foreign policy in the region by calling out attention to the cultural and linguistic similarities [1]. Soft power has been important for Turkey, since it eased the domestic barriers in the region while building partnerships. The Ministry of Foreign Relations of Turkish Republic pursues soft power strategies culturally and militarily. The cultural vein of these strategies are executed by The Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA). TIKA has also institutional ties with the Turkey Scholarship Program and Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). These governmental institutions are founded to reinforce the cultural ties between Turkey and Central Asian countries, provided scholarships to the students from the region, opened universities (that recently shut down in cooperation with the governments due to their relations with Gulenists). Then this policy also covered different regions, mainly the Middle Eastern countries, Balkan and Sub-Saharan countries — addition to the developmental aids to those regions. Further initiations of cooperation between Turkey and the Central Asian countries included Turkish Council (*Türk Keneşi*), TÜRKPA, TÜRKSOY. The aims of these partnerships have been promoting the cultural and economic cooperation. Particularly, TÜRKPA and TÜRKSOY, having founded by the suggestion of Nur Sultan Nazarbaev, reinforced the ideological approach of Turkish identity.

Secondly, Turkey have had a military partnership with Central Asian countries under the Organization of the Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military status (TAKM) [2]. This partnership was to combat organized crime, terrorism, smuggling and radical groups. So it has neither been against any countries, nor any organizations. Moreover, it was even useful for Russia and the other great powers [3]. TAKM has never been

bothersome for Russia. Indeed, Russia promotes the safety of Central Asian region with the Collective Security Treaty Organization and some other structures as well [3].

Turkey calls Central Asian countries *Turkic* countries, assumes the power of being a secular model to those countries having the same linguistic and cultural roots [1]. These countries are marked as the relatives of Turkish entity, security of the rooted old and secular culture, predominantly pre-Islamic. Congruent with the public opinion and to some Pan-Turkist nationalists, the public opinion never felt out of it. However, Central Asian countries did not perceive Turkish people as antecedents obviously. Yet, Russia, as the leading power would let Turkey to have those cultural ties moderately, as growing radical Islam would be much more difficult to handle and would make impossible to Russia to have an influence in the region.

The common interests of Turkey and Russia paved the way for cooperation between two powers while they are pursuing their own interests. However, one must consider the limitations of the power of this partnership, such as Turkey's membership to NATO and the natural competition between the two. However, Turkey has taken Russia as an endorsement for its both energy and cultural interests lately, by staying out of a real rivalry in Central Asia. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey puts Afghanistan to the first place in the developmental cooperation under TIKA after the US intervention, and Africa comes the second [4]. As Turkish foreign policy's priorities in terms of security has shifted to the Middle East with the respective instabilities in Iraq and Syria, Central Asian countries turned their faces to the Russian aids more.

Iran

The media and certain policy-corners mentioned much about Iranian foreign policy ambition. The focus has been on the rhetoric coming from the Iranian leaders, especially in terms of exporting their revolutions. However, a quick observation of the record simply indicates that Iran has not succeeded in exporting its revolution to any Muslim state, even the Shia majority ones. In fact, Azerbaijan, with a Shia majority of Azeri ethnicity, has shown distaste for the Iranian style regime. Iraq, another Shia majority state, has established a secular regime. In Lebanon, Iran has some influence with Hezbollah, but the political system is not in Iranian style. Moreover, the Shia populations in Bahrain, Kuwait, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere are either run by secular regimes or political system that has no similarity at all to that of the Iran Islamic Republic.

Iranian Foreign Policy Goals & Means

In theory, Iran pursues a non-alignment and anti-hegemonic foreign policy, by which is instructed to support deprived masses in any country, particularly in Muslim ones. In practice, however, the Iranian leaders have shown willingness to negotiate with any country on equal basis without any pre-conditions. Moreover, they have not supported all deprived masses in all countries, including in Muslim state. One particular example of Iran's pragmatic method, despite its Constitutional Principles and leadership rhetoric is that Iran has maintained close and friendly relationship with Armenia, despite the Armenian-Azeri Conflict, where Armenians control lands claimed by the Muslim Azeries.

In Central Asia, Tehran has not aimed to export its Islamic revolution or to support Islamic Radical groups, even though the many Central Asian nations have become receptive to Islamic training after decade of Soviet system which banned religion. In fact, Iran has maintained cordial ties with all Central Asia leaders, with the exception of Islam Karimov who passed away.

In the region, Tehran has followed a cooperative diplomatic, economic, and security relations. The diplomatic mission has focused on common cultural ties with the Central Asian, who celebrate many ancient Iranian holidays (such as the NeuRouz New Year) and event from the Persian Empire.

In economic terms, there is a big gap between theory and practice. Theoretically, Iran could have geographically been the gateway for the international trade of all Central Asian states with the outside world. In fact, the trans-Central Asia railroad has been connected with the trans-Iranian railroad for years. Thus, the products could move to and from Central Asia cities to the rest of the world and vice-versa via Iranian ports in the Persian Gulf. However, minor issues here and there have blocked this major economic option. Thus, there is limited movement of people and products between Iran and the Central Asian states, where you can find Iranian made good and some limited services offered throughout Central Asia. Moreover, there has been swapping of the oil and natural gas between Iran and Kazakhstan as well as between Tehran and Ashgabat. These were limited exchanges, so Iran has not become the gateway for the Central Asian fossil fuels for the rest of the world, despite the potential that exist there for such a trade.

In terms of security, both Iranian and Central Asians leaders are concerned about border security and smuggling activities. In practice, this area has been the most successful aspect of cooperation between Iran and the Central Asian states at both bilateral and multilateral levels, including via the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) structure. As an observer, Iran even attends the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meetings to coordinate its general policy directions. Using the challenging geographic features of the region, however, the smugglers have maintained a thriving business of smuggling opium and people across the borders of Central Asian states and Iran, despite the death punishment by firing squad at the sites of arrest in Iran.

Based on the factors that we examined about Turkish and Iranian presences in Central Asia, there is frankly no conflict of interests, ideologies, or strategies between the two so-called regional rivals. Thus, what is presented in most media outlet is for catching attention based on very few facts. Thus, we should focus more on global rivalry among the Great Powers.

Global Rivalry

The Great Powers are all interested in creating trade relationships with the Central Asian states. Competing for influence, they have used a variety of soft and hard power tactics to influence the region. Although concerns about instability are present, the Great Powers have continued to build relationships with these states since their creation.

Establishing airbases was one of the first tactics employed by the US and Russia in the post 9/11 era. While this move might not have directly been to balance Russia in the region, the threat was felt. The US and Russia have installed military bases to physically project their influence and offer security to the hosting country in the wake the Afghan

war [5, p. 37]. However, only Russia has been successful in retaining and maintaining their bases [6, p. 84].

Another tactic has been employing public and private international organizations to gain influence such: as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) of Russia, or the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) of as a Chinese initiation [5, p. 37–38; 7].

Of course there is difference between desiring regional control of Central Asia and attaining it. Each Great Power has distinct capabilities and challenges. Although the United States, Russia, and China have vast soft and hard capabilities, there are looming mutual concerns about the stability of the region. The Great Powers must consider their aptitude of combatting radical groups, political instability, and drug trafficking. There is much to gain from the region due to its geopolitical attributes and natural resources. In order to benefit from Central Asia's offerings, the Great Powers must consider their foreign policy goals, capabilities, and challenges.

II. GLOBAL RIVALRY

Russian Federation

The collapse of the USSR prompted Russia to lose a significant amount of precious territory. Although Russia shares similar language, infrastructure, and economy with Central Asian states, their ability to be the hegemon of the region has been diminished greatly. Internal and external factors have lead Russia to compete with other Great Powers for influence in the region. Attracted to the geopolitical location and valuable natural resources, Russia is determined to gain power in the Central Asian region.

Russian Foreign Policy Goals

Russian means for gaining regional hegemony include supporting authoritarian leaders who are more willing to work with Moscow. Monopolizing energy trade routes would also grant greater influence in the region [8, p. 636]. Russia is concerned about the large number of ethnic Russians who inhabit the region and seasonally migrate for work. Protecting them and preventing the spread of radical Islam are prime objectives. Russia naturally aims to decrease the influence of the US and China, so it may become the hegemon [8, p. 636]. Their policy towards achieving this goal includes sustaining instability. Alexey Malashenko from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace states:

Although the Kremlin has repeatedly stressed its commitment to stability, Russia nevertheless finds shaky situations more in its interests, as the inherent potential for local or regional conflict creates as highly convenient excuse for persuading the governments of the region to seek help from Russia in order to survive [9, p. 9].

The policy of perpetuating instability is akin to a divide and conquer strategy. Despite its merits, the same instability issues could eventually come back to haunt Moscow, if hegemony is achieved. Russia would essentially inherent the weakness, they have imposed. It would be in Russian best interest to quell the instability and act as an ally. Furthermore, international trade integration and Western military presence have created a delicate situ-

ation in the region. Upsetting one of the existing characteristics could generate a larger problem with instability. Despite a common cultural identity, Russia is unable to offset the economic power of China and diplomatic skills of the US. Thus, Russia is unlikely to become regional hegemon any time soon.

Russian Concerns: Russia is also heavily concerned with the drug trade prevalent in the southern Central Asian states. Heroin trade from Afghanistan makes its way up through the region into Russian territory, where there exists rampant drug addiction and drug related deaths. With at least 1 million heroin addicted citizens and 30,000 drug related deaths a year, a stricter grasp on the region would allow Moscow to prevent the drug problem from worsening [10]. US and NATO forces have played an important role in the prevention of drug trade, which places Russia in an uncomfortable position. The withdrawal of Western troops would allow Russia to have a dominant military presence, but worsen existing drug trade concerns [10]. The containment of the spread of radical Islam is another foreign policy goal for Russia. Once again, the withdrawal of NATO and US troops from the Middle East and Central Asia would leave a troublesome power vacuum. At the same time, Russia must appease and overcome Western influence in Central Asia if they desire to attain supreme regional influence [10].

Russian Capabilities

Moscow used soft and hard power tactics over the past decades to claim its stake in Central Asia. Russia has tried to dominate energy trade with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan since their formation [10]. At first, Russia held the most influence over the region's natural resources. The USSR fall left these states with similar ethnic identity, language, and most importantly: infrastructure. Russia took advantage of this opportunity to gain oil and natural gas in the "near abroad" until competitive offers from the US and China presented themselves [7, p. 598].

Cultural Identities: Although the Central Asian states have a great degree of ethnic diversity, many of their citizens have Russian heritage. Slavic Russian population, once the majority, has become minorities in the newly independent states. Furthermore, many migrate back and forth for seasonal jobs [10]. Together with similar languages and preexisting shared infrastructure, Russia holds vital soft power capabilities. Russia could play the brother in the region, by relying on the linguistic advantages. Furthermore, Moscow cares about the Slavic-Orthodox minorities in Central Asian countries. On the other hand, Russia could use these capabilities in the international arena. Using these capabilities in the international arena, Russians formed EurAsEc in 2000 with Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan [11, p. 5]. EurAsEc was the first step in forming an integrated economy similar to the European Union. It established joint programs for economic, transportation, social, and scientific programs. Issues related to trade were able to be resolved through EurAsEc. It was internationally recognized by the United Nations in 2003 [11, p. 6]. Although this IO had its successes towards creating an integrated Central Asia with Russia, it became clear some states were stronger than others. Furthermore, Russia's strong ethnic identity with Central Asia has become dwarfed by a Chinese identity. In 2014, 6.7 million Russian were reported in the region while it is estimated that there is near 110 million Chinese [12, p. 485].

Economic Influence: Russia's role as primary trade partners has been shadowed by China's excellent diplomatic and economic support. Outside actors have engaged in energy trade that has significantly diversified the region's economic partners [9]. In attempting to become a dominant economic force, Russia has created several IO's to form multilateral trade agreements like the EurAsEc Customs Union (CU) and the Single Economic Space (SEC) [11, p. 5].

In 2010, the CU was formed. It included Russia along with the best economies from EurAsEc: Belarus and Kazakhstan. A year after its creation, trade between the states increased by 33.3% [10, p. 6]. Encouraged by the success of the CU, the three states subsequently established SEC in 2012. Its goals include promoting the free movement of goods, capital services, and people. It was meant to be the next and final step before a fully integrated Eurasian Union [11, p. 6–7].

Although the CU and SES have had a degree of success, it by no means has become the dominant economic force of the region. In 2011, 85.6% of exports from Kazakhstan went to non-CIS states. Central Asia has found that Western states are oftentimes willing to pay more for their exports, therefore driving them to diversify their trade agreements [11, p. 9]. Furthermore, Russia has imposed higher tariffs within the SES, disadvantaging Kazakhstan and Belarus, especially in automobile trade. Despite slight inequity of trade agreements within SES, it still has good cause to exist. Russia and CIS states are heavily interrelated through labor and migration. An economic agreement is vital to assess their common goals [11, p. 10].

Physical Influence: As former USSR territory, Central Asian states still utilize Soviet military equipment. The region's defense forces wield many outdated Soviet infrastructure, vehicles, and weapons [13, p. 206–232]. As of February, the IISS Military Balance has reported Russian foreign deployment in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Russia holds many military bases in Kyrgyzstan and one reported base in Tajikistan. There is also one Russian radar station in Balkhash, Kazakhstan [13, p. 206–232].

Moscow does not like the presence of NATO troops as competition in the region. However, they have benefited from US and NATO presence in Central Asia and the Middle East in dealing with the spread of drugs and radical Islam. Russia also benefits from China's abilities to balance the Western powers. Consequently, it is near impossible for Russia to become the only physical force in Central Asia [10]. To deter NATO, Russia had employed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The CSTO is relatively weak as many member states engage in similar relations with China through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Uzbekistan, one of the wealthiest CIS states, began to back out of CSTO after the ethnic clashes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 2010. Kazakhstan is also inhabited by NATO troops through the Partnership for Peace program [14, p. 2–3]. It is highly unlikely that Russia will be able to achieve military prominence in the region given the current situation.

Russian Challenges

Despite cultural, economic, and hard power capabilities, Russia has met several challenges in aiming to become regional hegemon. Their recent declining economy, regional instability, and the anti-hegemonic policy of the Central Asian states have withheld Russia from achieving their goals.

Economic Limits: Russia's goals to become regional hegemon face several obstacles. These factors are related to the economy, instability, CIS sovereignty concerns, and balancing Great Power's interests. Since Russia's economic crisis in the late 1990's, their role as an attractive trade partner to the region's states has been permanently damaged. Central Asian states have continued to diversify their trading partners, finding dealings with the West to be rather lucrative [10]. IO's like EurAsEc and SES have had a degree of success, but are easily dwarfed by the offers from other Great Powers- namely China. China's offers to build pipelines and procure attractive energy trade agreements with Central Asian states has taken a lot of business from Russia [10].

Instability: Ethnic conflicts, dangerous drug trade, and the spread of radical Islam offer a lot to create instability in the region. This has caused all Great Powers to address Central Asia with caution. However, the prospect of influence in the geographic location and energy trade is too attractive. Accordingly, Central Asian states have used this to their advantage and have "elastic" foreign policies [15, p. 297–300]. They tend to form relations with a diverse array of states, usually based on whoever fulfills their national interest most efficiently.

Central Asian Anti-Hegemonic Policy: While content with economic relations with Russia, the states in the region are wary of becoming neo-colonies to their intimidating neighbors. Moscow does not want to allot Beijing too much influence on the region; however, China's presence is necessary to offset the power emanating from the US. The US must tip-toe around relations with China and Russia in Central Asia if they wish to support US foreign policy in Afghanistan. The EU states also desires to access the natural resources while also implementing a better system of human rights, but needs China's presence to maintain stability [6, p. 598–599]. In the wake of complex Great Power advances, Central Asian states have found advantages in adopting "elastic" or "multi-vectoral" foreign policy.

In the early years of the independence of Central Asian countries, the Soviet past was considered as the history of the oppression, followed by de-Russification. Uzbekistan is a great example of this brand of policy. Although a relatively newly formed state, Uzbekistan has placed utmost importance on their independence, sovereignty, stability, and development. Their ambiguous alignment has protected them from entrapment and abandonment [15, p. 304]. At the same time, Central Asia was searching for a way to integrating to the rest of the world. This initiation lighted up new foreign relations with the USA, China, and even Turkey. Nevertheless, the role and the existence of Russia has never faded out, and Russian identity was looked up for at the same time. Therefore, Moscow was both the rival and the model for Central Asia. As a result, but still, Russia falls behind in its ability to become a Central Asian hegemon. They lack the means to appease each state's national interests and foster stability. Although they have a good deal of soft power influence on the region, the means to establish stability are currently not wielded by any single Great Power. This dilemma transforms Central Asia into the new Great Game in international relations.

Also the stability of the Muslims within Russian borders are significant for Moscow. By reluctant to see a rise of political Islam in the region, the stability of the Muslims in both Central Asia and within its borders have been a critical issue. Even though Central Asian countries followed a secular nation building processes, Islam has been an identifier of their identity. In fact, Islam does not recognize what modernism embarked societies under the name of nations [16]. Caroline Fourest refers to Tariq Ramadan's words for

the Muslims who live in a secular society would compromise their identities moderately. However, what he argues is these citizens of secular states with Muslim societies, perceive their Muslim identity was coming first [17, p. 377–378]. But indeed, it depends. For instance, in Uzbekistan, secularism is a strong vein, although people prefer defining themselves as both Muslim and Uzbek. Uzbek identity comes first by taking it to a secular Islam identity [18]. Thereby, if there is no space for nationalism in Islam, modernism finds a way to open a place for Islam in nationalism. Having being banned of practicing their religion under the Soviet rule, Central Asian countries would hesitate of Russian influence. Turkey shows up as the balancing power at this point. Although Turkey has not invested the region financially because of its lower economic capacity [3], Turkey have become successful in investing culturally to the Central Asia through identities and ideologies without underestimating the influence of Russia, by playing the secular model with a Muslim society during 2000s. Moscow has been moderate to the role of Ankara in Central Asia for its being a bridge between Russia and Central Asia. Moreover, Turkey plays to the moderate Islam leadership for both Central Asian countries and African Muslim countries and for some Balkan countries (such as Bosna-Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia), offering a compromise with Islam and a national identity. However, the fall of the Turkish model after the Arab Uprisings [19] and an opening up of the region to the Russian influence are often discussed. Nevertheless, Russians had to shake hands with Turks to maintain the bridge between Russia and Muslim societies, just like Putin did by an opening of a central mosque in Moscow with Erdoğan in 2015 [20].

China

Like Russia, China shares the advantage of geographic proximity and cultural closeness with Central Asia. Chinese diplomats have been able to form relationships with regional leaders with greater ease than Americans. This also involves the economic incentives China offers to the region. China aims to invest more in the region while fostering stability. They have been relatively successful despite minor tensions in their Xinjiang province.

Chinese Foreign Policy Goals

Unlike Russia and the US, Chinese policy in Central Asia has been predominantly business like. Not only is China economically equipped to make attractive deals, it is geographically close to the region and shares similar cultural values. China's goals for the region include political stability near their borders, hindering competing influences, and continuing to promote energy trade [10, p. 603–604].

Beijing aims to procure regional stability to protect its economic investments. Through the CNPC, China has built pipelines and lasting trade relations with Central Asian states since 1997 [7, p. 600]. Announced in 2013, President Xi started the new Silk Road policy. It is \$ 124 billion project to build transportation infrastructure from China to 60 other Asian and European countries. The goal is to become an economic superpower [21, p. 7]. Central Asia is geographically and economically significant to China. It is a major hub among Russia, Europe, and the Middle East and a vital trading partner in natural resource extraction. Local policy experts regard China as a 'crucial power' [21, p. 7–9].

With such large investment in the region, it is in China's best interest to maintain stability. Political instability could mean great economic losses. Chinese strategy for promoting stability has been to develop regional multilateralism and political influence with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) [22, p.277]. This organization ensures cooperation and mutual respect for sovereignty among the participating states. It gives China a closer grip on the political situation so they may protect their investments. Separatist movements in the Chinese Xinjiang province also jeopardize stability. Filling the area with Hans so far has deluded the movement, but it is still a looming concern for the Chinese [10, p.604].

Chinese Capabilities

The rapid development and large population of China call for great energy demands. China's number one aim for Central Asia is to benefit from the regional natural fossil fuels resources. Promoting development and stability are goals that further support their energy objectives [22, p.277]. The SCO has been an effective tool for assuring stability and cooperation between Central Asian states, China, and Russia. Although their extensive talks have not always been put into action, it serves as a useful communication channel between the states [14, p.2-3]. In fact, the CNPC has been the major actor for Chinese-Central Asian relations.

CNPC: Major energy related relations with the region began in 1997 when the CNPC acquired 60.3% of stocks from the Kazakhstan Finance Ministry. The transaction has been valued at \$320 million and set the tone for good business ties between the two states [7, p.599]. In the same year, the CNPC signed a contract with the Kazakhstan Ministry of Energy and Mines. It gave China the development licenses for three oil fields in Kazakhstan. Conversation about a pipeline began in 2004 between China and Kazakhstan, while China continued to diversify stock purchases with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan [7, p.599]. The China-Kazakhstan Crude Oil Pipeline Agreement was signed in 2005 and exportation began as early as 2011. The CNPC also signed natural gas pipeline agreements with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan in 2007 [7, p.599]. Today, China continues to export a majority of the natural resources from Central Asia while maintaining friendly diplomatic relations.

One reason the CNPC has been so successful in their experience with the region is their incentives. When they sign agreements with Central Asian states, they offer grants, engineering resources, and cutting edge innovation [7, p.599]. Working with China gives the region's states much to gain. Furthermore, China does not pose as a security threat like Russia and the US appear to be. Their interests are transparent and offer competitive advantages.

Chinese Challenges

Compared to Moscow and Washington, Beijing has had fewer setbacks. With the absence of military presence, China currently has the best economic hand to influence the region. However, Chinese are not without any concerns. Every Great Power approaches Central Asia with a wary regard for the instability, which can jeopardize their investments tremendously [7, p.603].

Despite its economic soft power, China has its concerns. Instability pertaining to separatist movements in their resource rich Xinjiang province is one of them. The Uighur residents in the area identify themselves with Central Asia more than China. As the Xinjiang province possesses valuable natural resources, the Chinese are motivated to be persistent in quelling the separatist discourse. Measures include saturating the area with ethnic Hans who strongly identify as Chinese [10, p. 604]. The area has witnessed many violent episodes involving the Uighurs and Chinese. However, the true nature of these episodes- defensive or offensive- is unclear due to a lack of objective media sources. The creation of the SCO ensures China that the Central Asian states will not defend this ethnic group and further safeguards their sovereignty over the province [23, p. 238–249].

China has not appreciated US military presence in Central Asia, especially as US and NATO personnel have been increasing in number throughout states surrounding China. However, China is also concerned about the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the consequential instability that could ensue. In this regard, US presence in the region is a double-edged sword wielded by the prominent instability and terrorist rings [22, p. 604]. To balance the US and Russia, China has used the SCO to establish multilateral cooperation and the CNPC to impose influence in energy trade.

USA

Washington's main interests in Central Asia relate to energy and the war in Afghanistan. President Obama employed mainly soft power economic tactics which met with both successes and failures. It is difficult to determine the Trump Administration's Central Asian foreign policy goals at this point. Based on his campaign, one can assume that his foreign policy may have some isolationist flavors. Unlike China and Russia, the US does not enjoy the diplomatic benefits of a common culture and must rely more on economic incentives.

American Foreign Policy Goals

The United States' role in Central Asia during the twenty-first century has been in relation to the war on terrorism. Combatting terrorist networks in Afghanistan has made the region a vital supply route for military personnel and equipment [8, p. 631]. To establish military bases in the area, the US has given subsidies and grants to cooperating states [6, p. 84–88]. Their relationship has been a mixed bag of soft and hard power tactics. American interests, however, deal with establishing regional security and energy trade. Central Asian states have had a difficult time finding stability after their independence. Their GDPs dropped immediately after independence and did not rise again until they began to integrate in global markets in the twenty-first century [8, p. 634]. Consequently, diversified energy trade has been a source of balancing and stabilization for the region. The more stable the region, the easier it will be for the US to target terrorist organizations and prevent them from spreading.

Obama Administration: President Barack Obama's Administration's main foreign policy goals were to create stability and relations friendly enough to allow the use of military bases and trade routes. The geographic location of Central Asian states is paramount for containing and eradicating terrorist organizations in the Middle East [8, p. 631]. The pro-

motion of democracy and human rights has been another consistent policy goal for the US and other Western actors.

Obama had called for a reset with Russia at the beginning of his Administration. He stressed areas for cooperation like the war in Afghanistan and nonproliferation, while cooling relations after the Georgian war. This “reset” policy was the perfect opportunity for President Putin to enact the “Putin doctrine” of regaining fallen territory [24, p. 35–38]. Consequently, Obama’s cooperative efforts with Russian were interpreted as weak. Allowing Russia to act aggressively, Crimea was able to be annexed. Despite some bilateral efforts to cooperate in Afghanistan, the US and NATO still have troops in post-Soviet territory while Russia continues to be assertive in their “near abroad” [24, p. 38–39].

Trump Administration: There are unknowns about how President Donald Trump will approach the Central Asian region. US-Eurasian relations were not a focal point of his campaign. It is possible that Trump’s goals in the region include continuing energy trade, fighting terrorism, assist in nuclear nonproliferation, and mending ties with Russia [25, p. 38]. Trump’s presidential campaign has also stressed a desire to “reset” relations with Moscow. The Russian economy has been harmed by the Obama Administration’s sanctions. Trump has alluded to lifting sanctions and promoting American-Russian business relations [25, p. 38]. However, the lifting of sanctions placed on Russia must be done delicately as to not appear to be appeasing Putin’s recent aggressive policies. Lifting sanctions placed due to the annexation of Crimea could translate as validation of the aggressive foreign policy. Russia would have incentive to continue such practices [26, p. 50–56].

President Putin has reason to distrust the West after all the economic pressure. However, in order to regain economic prosperity, relationships with the West are key. President Trump Administration offers an opportunity to mend ties [25, p. 40]. Rex Tillerson, Trump’s fist pick as Secretary of State and former CEO of ExxonMobil, had previously engaged in a joint-venture with one of Russia’s oil companies: Rosneft. The deal was valued and \$723 million and hints at a future with more business and less sanctions with Russia [25, p. 38]. Tillerson’s experience in the energy field were useful for future engagements with the region. The main focus of the new Secretary Pompeo, however, has been elsewhere so far.

President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, is the first leader of Eurasia to personally contact President Trump. They spoke on the phone November 30th about the future of US-Central Asian diplomacy. As Russia’s prime ally, a relationship with Kazakhstan will strongly shadow one with the Kremlin [27]. Nazarbayev and Trump spoke about opportunities for cooperation, including fighting terrorism and promoting nuclear nonproliferation. The US objective of stopping the spread of terrorist groups in Central Asia and the Middle East are aligned with Russia’s [27]. This offers an opportunity for cooperation and collaboration with Moscow. The US ambassador to Kazakhstan has stated that there is too much to gain from energy trade in the region to dramatically change foreign policy. He proposed in early December that Trump’s Administration will continue to promote stability, security, and energy trade in Central Asia during the next four years [28].

Kazakhstan has received the majority of attention from the US Department of State. Other Central Asian states have seldom been mentioned in US foreign policy discourse. Tillerson has had several encounters with President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. It is reported that they have had conversations in May about the future of US-Kazakh relations. At the 2017 World Expo in Astana, Tillerson delivered a small speech praising his friend-

ship with Nazarbayev and their strategic partnership [29]. On the surface, their relationship seems to be positive. At the UN Security Council Session, Tillerson talked about nuclear nonproliferation, and used Kazakhstan as an example for an excellent nonproliferation policy. Touting their peaceful foreign relations, Tillerson claimed that their efforts have made them a member of the “community of nations.” [30]. Based on the positive comments Tillerson makes about Kazakhstan, it does not appear that the US-Kazakh relationship will change drastically, even under the new Secretary of State.

American Capabilities

The Obama Administration utilized more soft power tactics in their relations with Central Asia. He aided borders projects, provided infrastructure grants, and gave subsidies to certain groups for the use of trade routes. President Trump’s means to back up his policy, on the other hand, are more difficult to discuss so early into his term.

Obama Administration: The US role in Central Asia has been diverse over Obama’s administration. The region is pivotal to the US efforts for the conflicts in the Middle East. US foreign policy in Central Asia has been a balanced mix of hard and soft power. Financial aid to Central Asian states had been used to allow the presence of US air bases to aid in the Afghan War up until 2009 [6, p. 84]. This incentive, however, has lost its appeal to Russian and Chinese pressure on Central Asian states. Even after receiving a package of \$30 million to Kyrgyzstan for airspace infrastructure programs, the US was not granted permission to retain their air base in Manas [6, p. 84]. The diplomatic strategy of financial assistance has granted the US access to the Northern Distribution Network. In 2008, agreements were made with Uzbekistan that allowed access to Afghan supply routes in exchange for a lofty annual payment of \$ 500 million [31].

Initially, Tashkent implemented a shift toward the West during Obama’s administration. In 2010, Uzbekistan not only began the process of dropping out of CSTO, but also left EurAsEc. The US was given use of Uzbek airports and infrastructure to transport nonmilitary items to help with the Afghan war effort. However, the Uzbek relationships fostered at this time seem to be more of a balancing against Russia than aligning with US [6, p. 85].

In Obama Administration earlier years, the US has also sent aid to Tajikistan to reconstruct borders. In exchange, they were granted access to send goods and troops through Tajik territory to Afghanistan. The US has maintained friendly diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan, but is economically dwarfed compared to Russian and Chinese relationships [6, p. 87–88].

Trump Administration: It is possible that President Trump aims to continue energy trade, fight terrorism, engage in nuclear proliferation, and improve Russian relations. However, these assumptions cannot be taken for granted. George Krol, the US Ambassador to Kazakhstan, has reported no desire from the President to change Central Asian foreign policy in December [28]. Nevertheless, Trump Administration policy has so far been unpredictable. Balancing Russia and China in the region will be a difficult feat as Trump has the reputation as a diplomatic wildcard. As China and Russia are continuing to cooperate over energy trade, Trump must be cautious in his relations with Xi Jinping and Putin [32]. If President Trump wants to continue the Obama Administration’s foreign policy goals for the region, he will have to utilize the soft power tactics used before him [32].

It has been reported in March that Trump desires to cut the Department of State funding by 37%. His strategy is to cut the inflow of money to the UN, 20% of which derives from the US. Furthermore, Trump's budget proposal included \$54 billion increase of defense spending [33]. This shift from soft to hard power has potential to upset many delicate diplomatic balances that President Obama established. For example, the survival of the JPCOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) about Iran was in question. Recently, President Trump declared withdrawal from JPCOA which changes the security calculations in the whole region. This also emphasizes that the new US President has stressed the importance of hard power over soft ones.

American Challenges

The Obama Administration faced competition from China and Russia in its Central Asian pursuits. While economic incentives have been effective as a soft power tactic, Russia and China have enjoyed the benefits of geographic and cultural commonalities, as mentioned earlier.

Obama's Setbacks: The economic crisis of 2008 was a major setback to US foreign policy. Budget deficits restricted the US from making as many friendly transactions with the Central Asians as China had. The economic packages the US was able to provide to the Central Asian leaders were easily overshadowed by Chinese bids [31]. The US had to compete with trade offers from China and Russia who were not only financially influential, but also held key geographic and cultural advantages (American Foreign Policy). The Obama Administration's main objectives in the region were to establish enough stability to allow supply routes to Afghanistan, develop energy trade, promote human rights and democratic ideals, and prevent state failure [6, p.90].

While it may seem impossible for the US to be a major regional influence, Washington can offset the influence of Russia. With more assertive Russian policy in places like the Ukraine and Georgia, Central Asian states are increasingly more cautious with Moscow. Additionally, the national interests of the Central Asians are not entirely aligned with those of Russians [34, p.165–166]. Consequently, US has the valuable advantage of being an actor able to balance Russian role in the region. The Magnitsky Act of 2012 was a bilateral effort to sanction Russian officials after lawyer Sergei Magnitsky was arrested and killed in jail [25, p.38]. After the annexation of Crimea, the Obama Administration's sanctioned Russia further. It has been detrimental to the Russian economy, as ordinary Russian citizens make only 87% of what they used to make before the sanctions in August of 2014 [35, p.7].

III. CONCERNS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Russia, China, and the US have distinct goals for Central Asia. However, their concerns are also aligned. The instability of the region threatens each Great Power's goals. Of course, external sources of threats are concerns for these new republics. Yet, the internal sources of threats seem to be more significant. In fact, the Great Powers agree that radical groups, political instability, and trafficking are the most critical internal threats in Central Asia.

Radical Groups

Central Asian states embrace a dichotomy of majority Muslim population with a staunch secularist policy. Furthermore, in a survey conducted in 2009, researchers found that 61 % of Central Asian Muslims did not support the idea of international Islamic solidarity [36, p. 306]. Most of the region's Muslims also do not adhere to all five pillars of the faith. The strictest of Muslims tend to be academically educated and fall within the age range of 17–30 [36, 308–318]. However, the small percentage of radical Muslims have prompted the local governments to be extremely secular.

The Muslim faith in Central Asia has had roots in the 7th century. It became quite popular in the Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan territories during the Soviet rule. 202 out of the 495 Soviet mosques were in Uzbek land during the 1950's [37, p. 176]. However, during the Brezhnev rule, underground radical movements began to take root in Tajik and Uzbek communities as the religion was being eradicated by the Soviet-Communist rule. As they became persecuted by the state, they began practicing a version of Islam similar to the radical Wahhabi brand. In turn, trying to combat and quell the movement has only propelled it [37, p. 178]. The constant battle between quieting radical groups and hindering their growth has been a self-promoting problem.

Central Asian states have faced clashes of ethnic and religious identity since their independence. In Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Uzbeks in the South have felt underrepresented and have subsequently mobilized themselves in 2010 [38, p. 21–24]. Kyrgyz are quick to blame their violence on the spread of radical Islam and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (extremist organization, prohibited in Russia) (IMU). Omelicheva proposes that the oppression of minorities has led to the spread of radical Islam. Persecuting ethnic and religious groups have forced them to develop underground movements and become defensive [37, p. 169]. The IMU has been described as a jihadist movement without major Islamic principles. There have been no aims at conversion or spreading the religion. Their goals in the twenty first century have been to gain power [37, p. 169]. Radical Islamic groups in Central Asia are mainly comprised of ethnically persecuted groups like the Uzbeks and Tajiks. While some like to contend that socioeconomic and political factors have led to radicalization, the radical Muslims in the region are well educated, urban dwelling individuals [37, p. 172]. Radical groups threaten the security and stability of Central Asian states and are a major deterrent to Great Powers from investing too much in the region.

Political Instability

The political institutions in the region are acting on a delicate balance of corruption and multilateral relations with powerful actors. Not only are foreign relations fragile, but multilateral regional relationships are currently based on rivalry and distrust.

Regional level: The allocation of water resources throughout the region is an example of leading to instability. Of course, water is not only vital for basic human needs and energy, but also for irrigation of crops and raising animals upon which many communities rely. For example, water is crucial for cotton growth in Uzbekistan in the Ferghana Valley [39, p. 1]. The Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers account for 90 % of the regions river water and 75 % of all water needed for agriculture. Kyrgyzstan controls a vast amount of the rivers, while Tajikistan has holding in the agro needs, leaving Uzbekistan at the

mercy of other powers [39, p.2]. The Ferghana Valley is where these water sources and countries connect and clash. The borders have been disputed multiple times from 2010 to present day, leaving a trail of many deaths, hostages, injuries, and account of arson and property damage in its wake. Furthermore, the lack of water for communities propels civil unrest and promotes instability through violent clashes [39, p. 11]. These ethnic clashes have more to do with resources than ethnicity. Thus, this is a typical example of resource conflicts.

State level: Political stability within Central Asian states shadowed by corruption, mafia networks, ethnic clashes, and illegal precedence. These states have not completely embraced the notion of a democracy since their creation. Considering their authoritarian leaders as legends who saved their country, citizens could not challenge their policies or expect free and fair elections [40, p. 138]. Nevertheless, these authoritarians have provided stability in the region. The most concerning issue is the forthcoming transfers of power, especially in Kazakhstan. The current President, Nazarbayev, has reigned since 1990 and is growing old. The Kazakh constitution allows for a temporary succession plan if the president is abruptly unable to rule, but there are no means nor precedent to establish a permanent president [40, p. 143]. Furthermore, this is an unspoken rule that ambitious actions have consequences. Rahat Aliev, the president's son in law, was vocal about his plans to run for election and was forced to leave Kazakhstan in 2007 [39, p. 144]. Uzbekistan also shares the custom of keeping ambitions hidden. The next ruler of Kazakhstan would also need Russia's silent blessing. Nazarbayev has been vital to helping the Kremlin carry out their economic community goals for Central Asia [40, p. 145].

There is a multi-tiered system of threats to stability in the region that will take years to resolve. The states themselves, their relationships with one another, and their relationships with the Great Powers are all currently vulnerable to conflict.

Drug Trafficking

Central Asia's geographic location makes regional security vulnerable to illicit trading. Afghanistan to the South has the world's largest poppy farms while Russia to the North has the world's worst opium addiction [41, p. 1235]. Illegal drug trade has become a large financial resource for terrorist groups. In the aftermath of 9/11, the West has made great efforts to quell terrorist groups and their hands in the drug trade in Afghanistan. Today, the majority of illicit trade is conducted on a mafia-state nexus [41, p. 1236–1237].

The collapse of the USSR allowed criminal syndicates in the region to take advantage of the insufficient border control. Since the 1980's, opium production in Afghanistan has increased 5 times. In 2010, roughly a quarter of all Afghan heroin ended up in Russia. That is essentially 90 metric tons of heroin being trafficked through Central Asia [41, p. 1237]. The trade is managed by regional mafias who also deal with trafficking cannabis, humans, and arms. Nowadays, heroin is their most lucrative product in the region. The local mafia has specialized in its trade since the 1980's and is associated with powerful businessmen and political elites [41, p. 1237–1238]. The mafia-state relationships are interdependent and mutually beneficial. The mafia-state connection is an exchange of favors where mafias are offered immunity for a percentage of this trade profits. For this reason, there is little violence involved in illicit trafficking [41, p. 1238]. Mafias also feel no need to engage in turf wars as the competition is not harsh. While actors outside the region continue to deal with

the terrorist drug related networks, the Central Asian mafias act with little risk of abolishment [41, p. 1238]. If Russia, China, and/or the US desire to tackle the drug trade issue, they would have to jeopardize destabilizing well established mafia-state relationships.

Future Prospects

Although not all Great Powers have approached the region in the same way, there is a substantial window for future cooperation. Russia, China, and the US have similar policy goals for political stability, containment of radical Islam, and prevention of trafficking. All pursue an open door foreign policy with Central Asians. Areas where the Great Powers differ include the favorite types of political system: authoritarian or democracy. Russia and China have no problem building relationships with authoritarian leaders, while the US prefer to promote and establish a democratic political system. However, these differences do not need to impede a multilateral effort to eradicate political Islam and illegal trafficking. Cooperative diplomacy amidst the Great Powers can be utilized to address these concerns and manage their challenges in the twenty first century. Therefore, the story of the Great Powers in Central Asia does not need to end sadly.

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